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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000318

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO SA AMBASSADOR QUINN, INL/FO, NSC FOR
AHARRIMAN AND KAMEND

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: UNODC DIRECTOR COSTA NOTES RISE IN 2006 OPIUM
CULTIVATION; URGES GOA-LED ERADICATION EFFORT

Classified By: ADCM ANGUS SIMMONS FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

11. (C) Summary: During an official visit to Afghanistan (January 19-22), Executive Director of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Antonio Maria Costa met with US, UK, and GOA officials to discuss GOA CN programs. Director Costa met with President Karzai on January 21 and presented him with the summary findings of UNODC's 2006 Rapid Assessment Opium Cultivation Survey for Afghanistan (RAS). Director Costa discussed the expected increase in opium cultivation for 2006 and GOA eradication efforts, especially governor-led eradication (GLE). End Summary.

12. (C) UNODC's Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa, in Afghanistan January 19-22 for an official visit with the GOA, met with counter narcotics (CN) officials from the US and UK. On January 19, Director Costa met with Embassy Kabul CN Task Force Director Doug Wankel to discuss, in broad terms, the CN situation in Afghanistan. Citing the findings of the RAS, Costa said that opium cultivation will likely increase in 2006 (a view shared by CNTF Director Wankel) and that governor-led eradication (GLE) is necessary and will need to be effectively implemented, if the GOA is to sustain and seek to reduce 2005 opium cultivation levels. Director Costa said that he would discuss the RAS with President Karzai to obtain his views and discuss what should be done to offset the reported increase in planting of opium poppy.

13. (C) On January 21, at a dinner hosted by UK Ambassador Rosalind Marsden, Director Costa told CNTF Director that he had met with President Karzai and discussed the findings of the RAS and stressed the need for GOA eradication action. Director Costa said he was pleased with the President's response and seeming "acceptance" of the summary results, saying that his staff had been keeping him informed of expected developments on the cultivation front. He said, while he was not happy, he was not surprised that poppy cultivation may increase this year. Karzai went on to say that he has directed the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Provincial Governors to ensure that there is effective, Governor-led eradication this year throughout Afghanistan. Karzai told Costa that he would be speaking to a number of governors, that the MOI is bringing to Kabul on January 24 in order to finalize operational plans for eradication. President Karzai said that he would make clear their responsibility in ensuring eradication of opium poppy in their respective provinces. Costa noted that Karzai appeared much more engaged and knowledgeable about the opium cultivation situation and eradication needs than in previous meetings.

14. (C) Costa, supportive of governor-led eradication (GLE), has instructed UNODC's Afghanistan office to support GLE by conducting the monitoring and verification of GOA opium eradication to include GLE eradication, Afghan National Police eradication and Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) eradication. Director Costa said, "in order for there to be sustainment of opium cultivation at the 2005 level, or lower, it is essential that GLE be effective and carried out in all of the key poppy cultivation provinces of Afghanistan."

15. (C) On January 23, CNTF Director Wankel received the Summary Findings of the RAS. The survey indicates that there is an expected increase in opium cultivation in 13 provinces, a decrease in 3 provinces and in 15 provinces cultivation is expected to be at the same level as last year. The Summary Findings also conclude that overall opium cultivation will be higher than in 2005, but does not give a projected level. Sharp increases are projected for the PEP Provinces of Badakhshan, Helmand, Nangarhar and Uruzgan; the same level of cultivation as last year is projected for Balkh, Farah and Kandahar. The RAS also points out that security is a concern in Kandahar, Northern and Southern Helmand, Zabul, Farah and the border districts of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika and Khost. The RAS concludes that GLE will begin to be significantly implemented by mid-January and that the Afghan National Police and the AEF will conduct later eradication, these activities will be better organized and coordinated between the GOA and its stakeholders, and eradication will likely be more successful in 2006 than it was in 2005.

16. (C) Comment: The Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS) confirms what the Embassy, the UK, the GOA and the relevant CN authorities have believed for some time--opium planting levels will be up in 2006. That's the bad news. The good news is that the central government and the governors of most of the major poppy growing provinces are committed to eradication and are taking action to ensure governor-led eradication (GLE). To date, operational planning for GLE has been conducted at the ministerial and provincial levels and extensive communication and coordination is occurring between the central government, the provinces and the relevant international authorities (US, UK, ISAF, CFC-A, UNODC). Significantly, the GOA recognizes the magnitude of the opium cultivation problem and that eradication is a critical component of the CN Implementation Plan necessary to meet the goals of the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) to sustain and reduce opium cultivation from 2005 levels. Karzai is holding the governors responsible for eradication and in turn the governors know that they can rely on the central government for eradication resources, supplied by the U.S. and U.K. Many of the governors are heeding the President's call for action and are planning for eradication operations. Some governors, Kandahar, Balkh, and a few others are reported to have already begun eradication operations.

17. (C) The Embassy is fully-aware that meaningful delivery of eradication operations is needed to back up the GOA and the governors' stated commitments to eradication. The Embassy knows that there are many variables which could derail the GOA's intentions and disrupt efforts,--security being one of the most worrisome of these concerns. We are hopeful that farmer resistance (as seen in Maiwand District last year) will not be an issue in too many areas during GLE, but concern remains that Afghan insurgents and/or drug traffickers could spur farmers and villagers to resist eradication efforts. By the end of February or the beginning of March, the Embassy will have participated in and monitored and verified enough events surrounding eradication to predict the GLE campaign's level of success. In the interim, the Embassy will continue its reports on the progress, problems and setbacks relating to GLE. End Comment.

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